

PROTECT YOURSELF

How can nurses protect themselves from hepatitis C infection in the workplace?

Handwashing and standard precautions are the best lines of defense against the spread of all bloodborne pathogens in the health care setting. The precautions listed below will help protect you from exposure to bloodborne pathogens on the job:

Standard precautions:

- ◆ Wear gloves whenever there is potential contact with any patient blood or body fluid.
- ◆ Wear recommended personal protective equipment whenever exposure to eyes, nose or mouth can be reasonably anticipated.

Sharps with Engineered Sharps Injury Protections:

- ◆ Use all sharps devices as recommended. Provide feedback on the effectiveness of new devices. If the sharps disposal container does not allow for the safe and easy disposal of sharps devices, ask for another.
- ◆ Alert your supervisor if recommended safety equipment is not available - including gloves for barrier protection, sharps disposal containers and sharps with engineered sharps injury protections.
- ◆ Take the time to discard all sharps equipment carefully and appropriately to ensure everyone’s safety. Wash your hands after disposal of any contaminated device.
- ◆ Make sure sharps disposal containers are conveniently located in areas where patient care is provided. If a box is not available or securely positioned at eye level, notify your supervisor or occupational health nurse.
- ◆ Do not use overfilled containers! You have the right to prompt removal and replacement of filled containers. In the case of a problem, notify your supervisor or occupational health department.
- ◆ Take the time to learn how to use new safety devices. Attend training and practice sessions.

www.masshepc.org
1-888-443-HepC (4372)

www.cdc.gov
www.osha.gov



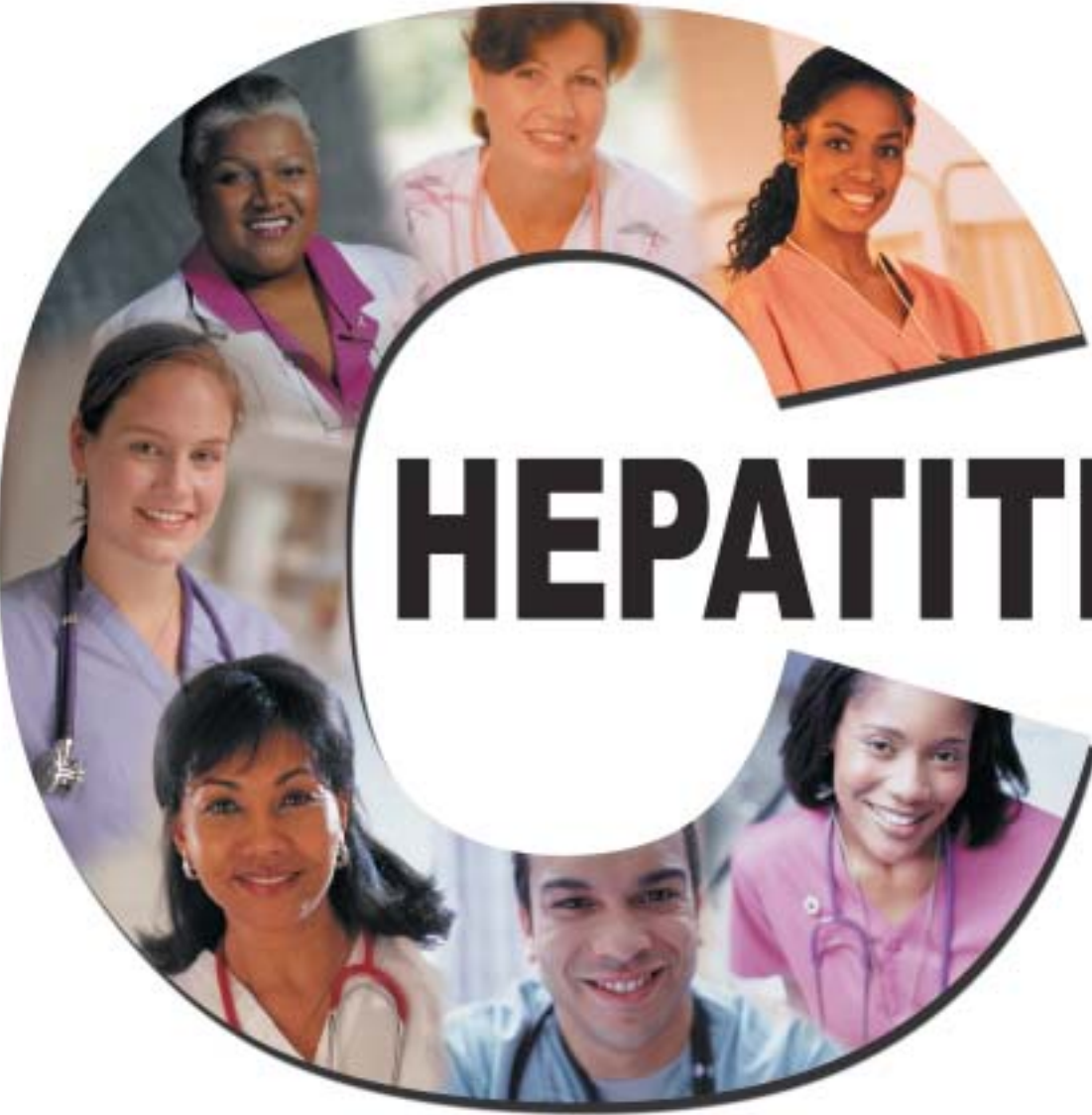
What should nurses know and do before and after a needle stick injury?

Understand recommended OSHA guidelines:

- ◆ Your employer is obligated under federal law to provide safety equipment:
 - Eye protection
 - Sharps with engineered sharps injury protections
 - Gloves
 - Sharps disposal containers
 - Face shields or masks
- ◆ Employers must provide free hepatitis B vaccination to workers at risk of exposure.
- ◆ Employers must provide immediate confidential testing, follow-up, treatment and prophylaxis when medically indicated, as recommended by the U.S. Public Health Service, after occupational exposures. (Employees are covered for occupational injuries or exposures under Workers’ Compensation Law.)
- ◆ If you report an occupational exposure and your employer is unwilling to provide appropriate care or cover the cost of your care, contact the Massachusetts Department of Industrial Accidents in Boston (617) 727-4900.
- ◆ If you believe that your employer is not meeting its obligations, you have the right to file a complaint with the regional Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) office (617-565-9860 OR 800-321-OSHA). You can call OSHA at any time to talk about your concerns confidentially, without filing a formal report.
- ◆ If you have ever had an occupational exposure and were not tested for hepatitis C, consider being tested now.

If an exposure to bloodborne pathogens occurs:

- ◆ Clean the wound thoroughly with soap and water.
- ◆ Report your injury to your supervisor immediately.
- ◆ Go to the area designated for emergency care and evaluation.
- ◆ Complete an employee exposure form with as much detail as possible.
- ◆ Avoid attributing blame.
- ◆ Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) for HIV should be administered as soon as possible. CDC recommends a two- or three-drug combination. Be sure to complete the entire recommended course.
- ◆ If a source patient is identified, your supervisor or other designated agent should be responsible for seeking the patient’s consent to be tested for HIV and hepatitis.
- ◆ Be aware of your employer’s policy for baseline testing after exposure. The decision to be tested is yours.
- ◆ CDC recommends follow-up counseling and testing at 6 weeks, 12 weeks, and 6 months. If a source patient is found to be both HIV positive and hepatitis C positive, follow-up testing might be extended over a 12-month period.
- ◆ Consider seeking professional counseling for stress management.

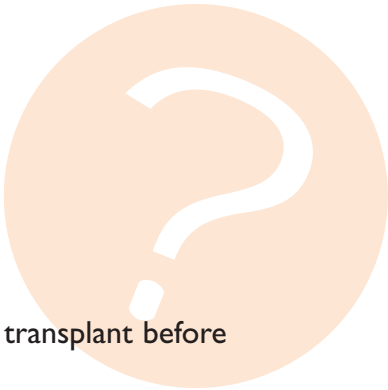


Learn More. Be Sure.



Nurses need to know.
www.masshepc.org ◆ 1-888-443-HepC (4372)

EDUCATE YOUR PATIENTS



Questions you can ask when assessing patient risk of hepatitis C infection:

- ◆ Did you receive a blood transfusion, blood products, or an organ transplant before July 1992?
- ◆ Have you ever (even once) injected drugs not prescribed for you?
- ◆ Have you worked in a profession or job where you were exposed to blood through a needle stick or sharps contact?
- ◆ Have you ever received kidney dialysis?
- ◆ Have you had unprotected sex with a known hepatitis C positive person?
- ◆ Have you had sex with many different partners without using condoms?

Patients who answer “yes” to one or more of these questions above may be at risk of hepatitis C infection.

What to tell patients who may be at risk (and haven’t been tested):

Consider getting tested because if you have hepatitis C:

- ◆ There are steps you can take to avoid the progression of the disease (e.g., avoiding alcohol).
- ◆ You can avoid spreading hepatitis C to other people.
- ◆ There are treatment options.

Take these precautions:

- ◆ If injecting drugs, never share any drug injection equipment that could be contaminated with blood (syringes, cookers, cottons, etc.).
- ◆ If injecting drugs, enter a drug treatment program and/or consider using a needle exchange.
- ◆ Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and hepatitis B.
- ◆ Don’t share razors, toothbrushes or other household items that may be contaminated with blood.
- ◆ Use a latex condom every time you have sex.



What to tell patients who have tested **POSITIVE** for hepatitis C:

- ◆ Many people live with the disease for a lifetime without any symptoms. Others may experience serious liver damage.
- ◆ There are things you can do to reduce the risk of disease progression. Getting primary care is important and there may be treatment options.
 - Eliminate alcohol intake. If you need help, ask for it so that you can take steps towards this goal.
 - Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and hepatitis B. These infections can cause additional damage to the liver.
 - Talk to your health care provider before taking any medication or herbal remedies, since some medications and herbs can harm your liver. This includes non-prescription medications.
- ◆ You can avoid spreading hepatitis C to other people by:
 - Never sharing any drug injection equipment. Enter a drug treatment program and/or consider using a needle exchange.
 - Using a latex condom every time you have sex if you are not in a long-term relationship with a single partner. While sexual transmission of hepatitis C is rare, using condoms will help protect the non-infected partner from hepatitis C and can protect both partners from many other sexually transmitted diseases.
 - Never sharing razors, toothbrushes or other household items that can be contaminated with blood.

What to tell patients who have recently tested **NEGATIVE** for hepatitis C, but are still at high risk for becoming infected:

- ◆ Although you have tested negative, remember that you may still be at risk.
- ◆ If injecting drugs, never share any drug injection equipment. Enter a drug treatment program and/or consider using a needle exchange.
- ◆ Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and hepatitis B.
- ◆ Don’t share razors, toothbrushes or other household items that can be contaminated with blood.
- ◆ Use a latex condom every time you have sex if you are not in a long-term relationship with a single partner. While sexual transmission of hepatitis C is rare, using condoms will help protect the non-infected partner from hepatitis C and can protect both partners from many other sexually transmitted diseases.

What is hepatitis **C**?

Hepatitis C is a virus that causes liver disease. Hepatitis C is a completely different disease from hepatitis A and B.

An estimated 100,000 people in Massachusetts have hepatitis C. Most of them don’t know it—so they may not be taking important steps to protect their health.

Tips on Counseling About Safer Sex and Drug Use

Sex practices and drug use are difficult topics to discuss, but they are necessary to provide patients with critical information about protecting themselves and others.

- ◆ Assure patient confidentiality.
- ◆ Help your patients explore their options for reducing sexual or drug-using behavior risks.
- ◆ Let your patient know that issues about disease transmission are important.
- ◆ Listen to your patient.
- ◆ Accept that your patient’s values may be different from your own.
- ◆ Be sensitive to expressions and gestures (both yours and your patient’s). Eye contact, tone of voice, posture, and physical distance from your patient can confirm or contradict what is being said.
- ◆ If appropriate, a sense of humor can sometimes help communication.
- ◆ Avoid judgements about a patient’s personal behavior.

Tips for Sensitive Conversations

To open the conversation, ask:

- ◆ “What over-the-counter or prescription drugs are you taking?”
- ◆ “How often do you use alcohol?”
- ◆ “Do you have a close friend or relative with hepatitis C?”

Honest answers may be more forthcoming if the behaviors discussed are normalized:

- ◆ “Some of my patients who use drugs inject them or snort them through shared straws. Have you ever shared injection drug equipment or a straw to snort drugs?”
- ◆ “Some of my patients who inject drugs don’t share needles but use a common syringe (or rig) to mix and measure the drugs. Have you ever been in this situation?”

Ask direct questions:

- ◆ “Have you ever injected drugs or used drugs not prescribed for you?”
- ◆ “When was the last time you...?”
- ◆ “How often do you...?”
- ◆ “Do you use a latex condom when you have sex?”